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SPACE SHUTTLE HAS WIDE RANGE OF "FARES"

"How much does it cost to fly on the Space Shuttle?"

That is a question being asked with increasing frequency and it is a question to which NASA is paying a great deal of attention. NASA plans to begin Shuttle operation flights in 1980.

The answer is anywhere from less than \$10,000 to more than \$21 million depending on how much the cargo weighs and what volume is involved, whether it's on a reservation or standby-basis and what optional services are desired.

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Passengers?

"No, not yet," NASA's Space Transportation Systems Operations Director, Chester M. Lee says. "Non-astronaut payload specialists may fly on some missions to conduct experiments and operate equipment but we're not ready to book tourists yet."

Lee notes that the Space Shuttle will carry as many as seven people on a flight. Three of these will be crew members, astronauts supplied by NASA -- pilot, co-pilot and mission specialist. The other four would be payload specialists, assigned by the customer for the mission.

At the low end of the fare structure is the so-called "get-away special" which permits an individual or organization to fly a payload in the Shuttle on a space-available basis for \$10,000 or less. To qualify for this low fee the proposed payload must involve research, weigh less than 200 pounds and have a volume of less than five cubic feet and be self contained. Any services cost extra.

The \$21 million fare is for using the full capacity of the Space Shuttle on a reservation basis by non-U.S. government customers.

In between are charges made for customers sharing the Shuttle flight with other customers, customers willing to fly on a stand-by basis and customers who have made a substantial investment in the Space Transportation System development. This latter category includes the European Space Agency, its member nations and Canada. ESA is developing the Spacelab to be carried in the Shuttle and Canada is developing the remote manipulator system which will be used in the Shuttle.

Lee says the pricing policies are designed to encourage full use of the Shuttle by making the charges economically attractive while recovering the total operating costs incurred by NASA. Also for commercial and foreign users there is a use fee that covers depreciation of facilities and equipment and amortization of orbiters.

"After three years of operation we plan to reexamine prices to determine whether operating costs are being recovered and to make adjustments if necessary," Lee said. Also, Lee said, the policy has an escalator clause to account for increase due to inflation.

There are reduced price incentives for payloads having exceptional merit and added charges for short-term callups, postponements or cancellations. Lower rates are offered for standby payloads, for floating launch date options and for reserving space on future missions.

"Our policies also make it possible for several users to share a Shuttle flight, with the price of the shared flight being a fraction of the cost of the total mission," Lee said. Charges for shared flights will be based on the size of the payload and its destination.

The NASA policy covers subletting of space in the Shuttle and includes standard services such as design reviews, safety reviews, flight planning, provision of a three-man crew and transmission of payload data. Optional services available for additional cost include special crew training, upper stages and services, special mission kits, revisit and retrieval of satellites and special equipment.

The Space Shuttle is a reusable spacecraft that will make possible frequent and routine access to space at costs less than if the present expendable launch vehicles were used.

The Space Shuttle Orbiter payload bay, or cargo compartment, will carry loads weighing as much as 65,000 pounds and as large as 15 feet in diameter and 60 feet long. The Shuttle will be launched vertically, as the present launch vehicles are, maneuver and operate in low Earth orbit (up to 500 miles above Earth) and return to Earth by gliding to a landing on a runway like an airplane. After landing, the Space Shuttle will be checked and refurbished and prepared for another space mission in about two weeks.

The first Space Shuttle Orbiter, named Enterprise, is undergoing approach and landing tests at NASA's Dryden Flight Research Center, Edwards Air Force Base, Calif. First orbital flight test is scheduled for launch from NASA's Kennedy Space Center, Fla., in 1979 and the first operational flight is scheduled for 1980 from Kennedy Center.

A second launch site is scheduled to become operational at Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif., in 1983. By 1984, NASA expects to achieve a launch rate of about 60 per year using both the Florida and California launch sites.